

Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) FY07 Program Summary

Administration

- The program is administered on the state level by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).
- DHCD contracts with nine (9) Regional Non Profit housing agencies (RNPs) to administer the program on the local level, throughout the state.
- The RNPs will begin accepting applications as of August 15, 2006.

Program Goal

- To provide short term, limited financial assistance which will enable families to retain housing, obtain new housing or otherwise avoid homelessness.

Eligible Family Household

- Two or more people living together, one of whom is a dependent child under the age of 21, **or**
- Two or more people living together, one of whom is disabled, **or**
- A single pregnant head of household

Income Eligibility

- Program Participants must have **incomes at/below 50% of area median income** as defined by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Target Population

- **Homeless** families moving into subsidized or private housing, and families **at risk of homelessness** due to a significant reduction of income or increase in necessary household expenses.

Homelessness

- Lacking a permanent place to live. This includes families living on the street, residing in a homeless shelter, participating in a transitional housing program, doubled up with other households, or living in a severely overcrowded situation.

At Risk of Homelessness

- Experiencing a significant reduction of income or increase in necessary household expenses such that the family cannot pay their current housing costs and is facing a potential eviction or loss of utility service. The applicant must not have been primarily at fault for causing the significant reduction of income or increase in expenses.

Eligibility of Subsidized Applicants

- Except for the restrictions noted below, subsidized applicants, if determined eligible and qualified, may be approved for all other allowable uses of program funds.

Restriction on Use of Funds for Rent Arrearages for Subsidized Applicants

- Subsidized households pay rent based on a percentage of household income and have the ability to have their rent adjusted. Therefore, there is a presumption that households currently living in subsidized housing would not qualify for assistance for rent arrearages because they are unable to meet the standard of at risk of homelessness due to a significant reduction in income or increase in necessary household expenses.
- To rebut this presumption, such applicants must submit the At-Risk of Homelessness Certification form (page 7 of program application). Applicants must have this form completed by the Local Housing Agency (LHA) that provides their housing assistance. Such applications will be considered incomplete unless the Certification form is included with the application.

Definition of Subsidized Housing

- DHCD has defined subsidized housing as any property in which public funds are used to reduce the apartment rents. This includes:
- all public housing
- all units in privately owned housing developments that are receiving public funds, and the unit rents are based on household income
- all rental housing voucher programs

Determination of Program Qualification

- In addition to Income Eligibility, applicants must meet the following two qualification criteria:
- **Financial Crisis;** The applicant must demonstrate that there was a one-time, extraordinary event beyond the control of the applicant that resulted in a significant reduction of income or increase in expenses.
- **Housing Stabilization;** The applicant must demonstrate that new income has been secured or expenses reduced such that the applicant will be able to afford housing expenses going forward. Both thresholds must be met in order to be determined qualified for RAFT financial assistance. Demonstrating an unintentional financial crisis in and of itself is not sufficient.
 - Unless the facts of the case warrant otherwise, the RNP shall apply a presumption that housing will be stabilized if the applicant is paying less than 50% of its income for housing.
 - For applicants paying more than 50% of income, the RNP must give such applicants a fair opportunity to establish that RAFT assistance will enable the applicant to obtain housing stabilization.

Participant Application Process

- Applications for assistance will be accepted on a first come, first served basis.
- Interested applicants must apply for assistance at the RNP that services the city/town where the applicant is currently residing. The **attached list** contains the mailing address, phone number, and website address of each RNP, as well as the cities/towns within their service areas.
- Each RNP will have additional information concerning their agency's application process on their **website**. Persons interested in applying for the RAFT Program are strongly encouraged contact the appropriate RNP (via phone or website), prior to submitting an application.
- Applicants must complete the program application form and provide written documentation concerning household income and housing expenses.

Additional Documentation Requirements

- Applicants will need to provide the RNP with additional written documentation, depending on the type of financial assistance an applicant is seeking. The following are minimum requirements. The RNP may require additional documentation or verification of information, depending on the specific circumstances.
 - **Rent Arrearage-** Eviction notice or 14 day notice to quit, and copy of recent payment record (to be supplied by property owner), and for subsidized applicants, the At-Risk of Homelessness Certification form.
 - **Mortgage Arrearage-** Current mortgage statement, and letter from mortgage lender indicating that payments are at least sixty (60) days in arrears.
 - **Utility Arrearage or Heating Fuel-** Copies of recent bills and utility shut off notice. For applications submitted on or after November 1, 2006, applicants must document receipt of fuel assistance or pending application for fuel assistance (if Contractor determines applicant may be income eligible)
 - **Security Deposit, First/Last Month's Rent-** Copy of lease for new unit or letter from property owner stating amounts due upon lease-up
 - **Employment related Transportation Expenses-** Applicant must be employed and provide proof of ownership of vehicle and copy of bill from mechanic detailing work items and costs.
 - **Furnishings-** Applicant must currently be homeless and supply letter from shelter or service provider agency. Contractor must determine that such expenses are necessary to ensure that homeless families moving from a shelter environment are able to obtain to their own apartment, i.e., bedding, refrigerator.

Review of Denial of Eligibility or Qualification

- All applicants have the right to request a redetermination of an ineligibility decision. The RNP must establish an informal review process which generally will be conducted by a supervisor who was not involved with the initial determination decision.

Amount of Financial Assistance

- Pursuant to legislation, financial assistance cannot exceed \$3,000 per family. Eligible families can access program funds more than once, subject to the availability of program funds. However, in no event can total financial assistance to a household exceed the life time cap of \$3000.

Eligible Use of Funds

- Program funds must be expended for housing related expenses, only. Families in need of supportive services will be referred to appropriate service provider agencies. No cash assistance will be provided directly to the participant. The RNP will make payments to vendors (landlords, utility companies) on behalf of the participant.
- Eligible use of funds include:
 - Security deposits and First/last months rent
 - If participant needs to move
 - Utility arrearages
 - If utilities are currently shut-off or if the applicant has received a shut-off notice from their utility company
 - Rent arrearages
 - If participant is facing eviction
 - Mortgage payment arrearages
 - If participant is facing foreclosure
 - Monthly rental stipend
 - if needed to allow the participant to meet the “no more than 50% of household income for housing” threshold)
 - total funds approved for monthly stipends cannot exceed three (3) months rent
 - Furnishings
 - The RNP must determine that such expenses are necessary to ensure that homeless families moving from a shelter environment are able to obtain to their own apartment , i.e, crib, refrigerator
 - Transportation related expenses
 - if necessary to maintain employment
 - total transportation expenses cannot exceed \$1,500

Provision of Referral Services

- Program legislation requires that the RNP establish a system for referring participant families to existing community based organizations that provide other housing stabilization services.
- The RNPs also operate Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCEC). The HCEC serves as one stop referral service for housing consumers, service providers and property owners. As part of the application process for RAFT financial assistance, the RNP must assess the overall needs of applicants and maintain documentation of all referrals made to other housing stabilization services.
- Applicants not eligible for the RAFT Program are encouraged to request assistance through the HCEC network.

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